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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/23/2019  
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SUBJECT: CORRUPTION IN THE ERITREAN PASSPORT OFFICE

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Ten officials in the Department of Immigration (DOI) passport authority have been imprisoned for running an illegal passport operation, according to close embassy sources. The illegal outfit involved preparing false documentation for clients, including national service release and medical board clearance, both of which are prerequisites for obtaining an exit visa. The services cost between \$6,667 and \$10,000, payable in nakfa, and included a valid passport, which ordinarily costs only \$30. The GSE caught wind of the scheme and has restricted passport issuance to those who were demobilized in the first 14 rounds of national service (Eritrea is now on round 27). Approximately 70 clients took advantage of the scheme, mostly departing the country through Sudan.

¶2. (C) This is the second report Post has received in recent months of malfeasance in the passport office. Approximately eight months ago, the same operation reportedly took place, with dozens of employees arrested afterwards. Following the news, the passport office severely restricted its issuance policies.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Eritreans widely believe the DOI, the passport authority in particular, to be corrupt. Despite the office's constantly changing, and rarely published, policies, Post expects officials within the DOI to continue to sell passports and exit visas for large sums of currency to an increasingly desperate populace.  
MCMULLEN